

Committee Secretary  
Chair, Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety  
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Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
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Dear Committee Secretary,

**Re: Inquiry into Social Media and Online Safety**

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House Select Committee on Social Media and Online Safety. The RACGP is Australia's largest professional general practice organisation, representing over 43,000 members working in or toward a specialty career in general practice. We provide comments specifically relating to the role of social media in providing health information.

Social media has opened valuable new lines of communication between health practitioners and the community, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the spread of harmful misinformation via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In particular, advice from non-medical experts undermining vaccinations has jeopardised the health of people who read and accept this information as fact.

Improving access to trustworthy sources, which provide evidence-based health information, is crucial. Social media companies should recognise the difference between health information appropriate and safe for public consumption and information that can cause harm. Information that can cause harm should be removed or carry an alert highlighting if it is not medically or scientifically endorsed and may cause harm. The algorithms used by social media companies to prioritise information need to reflect this.

Furthermore, security and privacy settings of all social media platforms should be set to ensure that, where possible, users have control over who is part of their networks and who is posting the information they consume.

Targeted actions, from social media companies and governments, to support consumer education and help people discern between misinformation and information that is evidence-based is needed. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may find it particularly challenging to decipher misinformation and reliable sources online. Developing consumer tools, which support navigating access to accurate health information and providing support for those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, would reduce inequity.

We encourage the Australian Government to continue to respond swiftly to limit the distribution of misleading health information, particularly around vaccinations, on all media platforms. Guidelines and mandates, outlining the responsibilities and actions required by social media companies to limit the impact of misleading and potentially harmful health information, are needed. An appropriate balance must be found between removing harmful information and ensuring people's right to freedom of speech is maintained.

Yours sincerely



Dr Karen Price  
RACGP President